Two siblings die, third hospitalised after taking quack's medicine

By Our Correspondent

TOBA TEK SINGH: After taking medicine from a quack, two ailing minor children of a labourer died and another is in serious condition in the locality of Mid Bhangwan located on Arayanwala Road in Sheikhupura.

Sobia, wife of Javed Iqbal, a labourer, told police that her three children were suffering from cough and throat infection and she had taken them to the clinic of one Shahid for medicine on Wednesday evening where he put some spray in the mouths of all three children and gave them a syrup.

When she returned home,the condition of all three suddenly deteriorated and she gave them syrup.

After this, Ghulam Murtaza (2) died instantly at 6pm the same day.

She took her other two children to the Mother and Child Clinic in the locality where her daughter Fatima Batool also died on Thursday at 2pm.

She shifted her third child, Fahad Ali (6), to Sheikhupura DHQ Hospital where doctors have referred him to Lahore.

Sheikhupura police arrested the quack, Shahid, and district health officer sealed his clinic.

Charges reframed against Parvez, thers in corruption case

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: An accountability court on Thursday re-framed charges against former chief minister Parvez Elahi and other accused persons in a reference of alleged corruption and kickbacks in development projects in Gujrat.

Judge Rana Muhammad Arif conducted the hearing of the reference as Mr Elahi, former principal secretary Muhammad Khan Bhatti and other accused appeared before the court.

The judge framed the charges against Mr Elahi and eight other accused persons afresh following the filing of a supplementary reference against two newly-added accused.

Previously, the court had indicted Mr Elahi and others on Jan 7, 2025.

All the accused pleaded not guilty and the judge summoned prosecution witnesses to record evidence.

As Mr Elahi has already been granted a permanent exemption from personal appearance, the judge directed that his appointed pleader must appear on the next hearings. The judge adjourned further proceedings till Jan 29.

Nawaz opens State Lounge at airport

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: PML-N President Nawaz Sharif, Defence Minister Khwaja Asif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Thursday inaugurated the renovated State Lounge at Allama Iqbal International Airport.

Defence Secretary Muhammad Ali welcomed the guests and participants to the inauguration ceremony.

Pakistan Airports Authority Director General Air Vice Marshal Zeeshan Saeed briefed them on the airport upgradation project, highlighting the key improvements carried out under the scheme. He said the Ravi Lounge, entrance lobby, main hall and other sections had been reconstructed.

"The State Lounge has been given a modern and aesthetically enhanced look following the renovation, aimed at improving facilities and services for state guests and dignitaries," he added.

LAHORE: A vendor sells coconuts on GT Road. — White Star / M. Arif

2,115 regular posts of doctors converted into temporary slots

Move is part of reforms to shed 'administrative fat', improve fiscal stability and commitment made with IMF; PMA flays decision

By Asif Chaudhry

LAHORE: The Punjab government has abolished 2,115 regular posts of general cadre doctors of the primary and secondary healthcare department (P&SHD) across the province and converted them into locum (temporary) positions, a move that has sent a wave of resentment among the medical community which declared it a major setback to the healthcare system.

The decision came after the provincial cabinet in its meeting held on Dec 15, approved "The Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Services (Secondary Level Human Resource) Rules, 2025 for hiring secondary-level human resources on a Special Pay Package."

The finance department also approved the same and created 2,115 posts in lieu of the abolition of the same number of posts.

The posts of various categories of general cadre/consultants belonged to the district and tehsil headquarters hospitals which were under the administrative control of the P&SHD.

An official privy to the development said the posts abolished by the Punjab government were declared as 'dying posts' as they were falling vacant for the last one year or so.

He linked the initiative to the abovementioned decision to the broader government reform strategy to reduce administrative costs and improve fiscal stability.

The official said the government has made a commitment with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to implement significant "rightsizing" measures as a condition for its loan programmes.

Following the IMF requirements, the Punjab government identified 2,115 vacant positions of grade 18, 19 and grade 20 that belonged to the general cadre doctors and were adding burden to the expenditures.

There were also reports that the health authorities believed that the doctors hired against the abolished positions on the lump sum package would deliver much better than those serving on a regular basis.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) strongly condemned the decision of the Punjab government.

PMA president Prof Dr Shahid Malik said abolishing regular posts of grades 18, 19, and 20 in government hospitals and converting them into locum (temporary) positions is a grave injustice to doctors who are already serving in the system on a permanent basis.

He said the current bureaucracy of the finance department has been misleading the government by taking such initiatives and diverting the allocated funds to other budget heads, which is highly unfortunate and condemnable.

"Appointing doctors on a locum or daily-wage basis will destroy the entire health system," the PMA president said.

He said the decision would inflict a major dent on the career progression of the qualified and trained medics in the health sector which ultimately would also have a grave impact on the healthcare to the patients.

"It will not only weaken the service structure but will also affect the promotion process of senior and regular doctors to grades 18, 19, and 20 because promotions required the availability of sanctioned posts", Prof Shaukat said.

The PMA president has appealed to the chief justice of the Lahore High Court to take immediate notice of the matter and suspend the notification issued by the finance department, so that the bureaucracy can be stopped from taking such actions and be prevented from repeating such moves in the future.

Consumers face outages despite Lesco zero loadshedding claim

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: Though the Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco) claimed ending the loadshedding, many consumers in urban and rural areas falling in the limits of the company complained on Thursday they were still enduring power outages.

Lesco management claimed to have observed zero loadshedding, except the localities falling in the areas of loss-making feeders, after receiving power supply from the national grid as per its actual demand. But, consumers complained about forced loadshedding for one to two hours in urban and more than this in rural areas. They also complained of squeezed water supply due to the non-operation of tube-wells because of the power load management.

A Lesco insider confirmed observance of loadshedding even in the areas falling within the service limits of the feeders making no losses.

"The loadshedding in our area continues. And it was also observed for almost two hours on Thursday," a consumer residing in Johar Town told Dawn. However, he said that the duration of forced load shedding has reduced considerably.

A consumer from Green Town also complained about two-hour loadshedding—for one hour in the morning and then in the evening, on Thursday.

According to a resident of Kasur city area, forced loadshedding was observed for around one-and-a-half hours (3pm to 4:15pm) on Thursday. "But, previously, we were facing three to four hours loadsheddig daily in our area," he maintained, adding that the Kasur rural areas are still being subjected to four to eight hours loadshedding daily.

Similarly, a resident of Batapur, Lahore, said the area was facing loadshedding for four to five hours daily.

A Lesco spokesperson had on Tuesday claimed observing zero-loadsedding after the company received power supply as per its demand. However, the spokesperson admitted loadshedding for three to six hours on the high-loss feeders.

However, both the Lesco chief executive officer and spokesperson were not available for their comments despite repeated calls made by this reporter.

Punjab to keep wheat reserves of 2.5m metric tonnes

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: In order to maintain strategic wheat reserves, the Punjab Food Safety and Consumer Protection (FS&CP) Department has decided to retain wheat stocks of 2.5 million metric tonnes on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis.

FS&CP Secretary Dr Kiran Khurshid said the procurement price for strategic wheat reserves would be fixed at the import parity price, set at Rs3,500 per 40kg.

Wheat procurement would be carried out directly from farmers' farmhouses or from their doorsteps, and all payments and records related to wheat would be digitised.

She said a fully digital monitoring system would be operationalized to ensure transparency in wheat quality, quantity and payments to farmers.

Dr Khurshid said the private-sector aggregators would be allocated districts after pre-qualification and the 'request for proposal' process.

The selection of aggregators would be made through competitive bidding based on profit margins and financing costs with preference given during pre-qualification to those offering lower profit and lower financing costs.

Dr Kirani Khurshid asserted that the pre-qualified private-sector aggregators would be responsible for arranging all primary financing and would be paid a guaranteed profit, with an upper limit ranging from 10pc to 16pc.

The aggregators would be provided guaranteed profit (up to an upper limit of 10 to 16pc during supply months) and financing at an upper limit of KIBOR plus 1pc on 70pc of the primary financing.

These payments would be made during the supply months, from September to March, at the time of utilisation of the reserves.

Woman dies in bid to get on moving train

By Our Correspondent

GUJRAT: In a tragic incident, a young woman died while trying to board the Peshawar-bound Awami Express at the local railway station on Thursday night.

Rescue 1122 officials say that Ansa Iftikhar (23) of Rana Town, Lahore, was traveling along with her family on the Peshawar-bound Awami Express originating from Lahore.

When the train stopped at Gujrat Railway Station, the woman alighted from it to buy something at the platform.

Meanwhile, the train started moving and the woman ran to catch her compartment.

As she was attempting to get on the train, she slipped and got crushed to death under its wheels, the officials say.

The rescuers reaching the scene collected the body and handed it over to the bereaved family.

Eight held for anti-judiciary campaign on social media, LHC told

Court directs PTA to block accounts identified by NCCIA for sharing 'objectionable' content

By Wajih Ahmad Sheikh

LAHORE: The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) on Thursday told the Lahore High Court (LHC) that at least eight individuals had been arrested for running a malicious campaign on social media against Chief Justice Aalia Neelum and other judges.

NCCIA Director General Syed Khurram Ali personally appeared before the court and presented a detailed report on the social media campaign against the judges.

He said the agency was making its utmost to identify and apprehend individuals involved in campaigns intended to malign the judiciary.

He further stated that the NCCIA had already compiled a list of the persons involved in such nefarious and unlawful activities and that all necessary steps were being taken to bring the perpetrators to book in accordance with law.

He assured the court that the matter was being pursued with due seriousness and urgency.

Justice Ali Zia Bajwa was hearing a petition filed by a lawyer, Chaudhry Pervez Elahi Bhaddar, challenging the campaign on social media against the female judges of the high court.

During the hearing, a federal law officer told the court that the petitioner had not provided them with the USB containing evidence against the suspects.

However, Advocate Mian Dawood, the petitioner's counsel, rejected the claim, saying he had provided the complete record and evidence to the NCCIA.

The judge instructed the lawyer to submit a USB containing evidence to the court as well.

The petitioner's counsel pointed out that the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) had neither blocked any channel nor any website.

A counsel for the PTA told the court that 53 institutions were authorised to use the PTA portal themselves to remove objectionable content.

"Can the PTA not take action on its own? How was X (formerly Twitter) blocked on its own?" the judge asked the PTA's counsel.

The lawyer said the PTA had blocked X on the directions of the interior ministry. He pointed out that most institutions in the country purchase and use Virtual Private Network (VPN) services to access the blocked websites.

The judge directed the PTA to block the accounts identified by the NCCIA that were sharing objectionable content.

The PTA's counsel stated that Facebook and X are secure applications. He said the PTA cannot block specific links as it can only block an entire application or website.

Justice Bajwa observed if a person abroad creates and shares 'objectionable' content, an action can still be taken against them in Pakistan.

The judge directed the PTA to trace the sources from where the videos were being uploaded and proceed in accordance with the law.

The petitioner's counsel argued that action should first be taken against those sharing 'objectionable' content while sitting abroad.

A deputy attorney general told the court that a total of 170 accounts had been identified as being involved in sharing 'objectionable' content.

He said 14 suspects have been traced through Nadra and three cases registered in Lahore and five in Multan against persons involved in sharing objectionable content on social media against the judges.

In his written order, Justice Bajwa observed that a judge or a judicial pronouncement may be subjected to academic, professional or public scrutiny, provided such criticism is made in good faith, expressed in temperate language and confined to the reasoning or legal conclusions of the judgment.

However, he ruled, where criticism crosses the bounds of propriety by imputing motives, bias, dishonesty or lack of integrity to a judge or is calculated to weaken public confidence in the administration of justice, it ceases to be protected speech and attracts legal consequences.

"Criticism intended to correct judicial errors is permissible, whereas criticism that corrodes the authority and independence of the courts cannot be countenanced," the judge maintained.

Justice Bajwa ordered the law-enforcement authorities to employ their utmost efforts, strictly in accordance with law, to identify and curb elements responsible for maligning or defaming the judiciary and for weakening public confidence in the administration of justice.

"Such action, however, must be regulatory and corrective in nature, and not vindictive or retaliatory, ensuring at all times that legitimate freedom of expression is neither stifled nor chilled," he reminded the authorities.

The judge clarified that the object of such enforcement was not to silence fair criticism, but to preserve the dignity, independence and authority of the courts through lawful, proportionate and restrained measures consistent with constitutional guarantees.

REPORT: The report filed by the NCCIA revealed that at least eight suspects have been arrested from different cities of Punjab following registration of FIRs.

Those arrested include Iftikhar Mehmood Chaudhry by Islamabad circle, Rana Sarwar and Shahbaz Amin by Lahore circle, Muhammad Ali, Rana Khalid Hussain, Ghulam Mustafa, Muhammad Ali Bhutta and Abdul Sattar by Multan circle.

The report further revealed that NCCIA-Lahore circle registered an FIR against a YouTube channel "Siyasi Dera" hosted by Ihsanullah Chattha, known as "Mitha Gee" for being involved in the dissemination of derogatory and defamatory content against the judges.

Chattha is famous for creating pro-PML-N content on social media.

The FIR was registered on a complaint of a lawyer, Akmal Khan.

The report stated that images of 30 social media account holders, involved in the derogatory campaign, have been sent to the Nadra for facial recognition.